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SUBJECT: OMAN SENDS ECONOMIC DELEGATION TO IRAQ

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Classified By: CDA Alfred F. Fonteneau, reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (U) An Omani delegation led by Mohammed bin Nassir al-Khusaibi, Secretary General of the Ministry of National Economy, completed a three-day economic mission to Baghdad on July 1. The 19-member contingent, which included officials from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Omani Center for Investment Promotion and Export Development, and the Oman News Agency, as well as private sector representatives, focused on strengthening economic and commercial ties with Iraq.

¶2. (C) According to Humaid al-Maani, Director of the Secretary General's Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the trip represented the first official Omani delegation to Iraq in years. He noted to Econoff that the delegation traveled primarily in response to the USG's "encouragement" to have Omani officials engage the Iraqi government in Baghdad. Maani continued that while the delegation was "apprehensive" at first about the visit, they were "very pleased" with the "constructive meetings" that were arranged for them by their Iraqi counterparts. In addition to continuing the exchange of delegations that last occurred with Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki's visit to Muscat in April 2007, Maani added that the Secretary General was able to get substantive work accomplished, such as agreement on memorandums of understanding on double taxation and investment.

¶3. (U) Notwithstanding the fact that the trip was not publicly announced prior to its departure, the delegation received ample front page coverage in both Oman's Arabic and English language press dailies. The tone was predictably positive, with the media highlighting the Secretary General's and the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister's interest in strengthening their bilateral relationship. Comments posted on the Arabic Internet chat site "al-Sablah" were not as laudatory, as the site's blogger questioned the Omanis' motive for the trip by asking, "Is the goal of this visit to lift U.S. pressure off Oman in terms of its 2008 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report?"

¶4. (C) Comment. The timing of this quickly-organized trip was somewhat surprising in light of Omani government current furor over its Tier 3 classification in the 2008 TIP Report. Oman's interest in exploring business opportunities in Iraq rings true, however, as representatives from companies owned by Omar al-Zawawi, leading Omani businessman and close confidant to the Sultan, were included in the delegation, as well as representatives from Tawoos, an Omani oilfield services and telecommunications equipment company founded by prominent members of Oman's royal family. End Comment.

FONTENEAU